

N. 14.

T H E

Sincerity of the Dissenters

VINDICATED,

From the Scandal of

Occasional Conformity,

W I T H

Some Considerations on a late Book, En-  
titul'd, *Moderation a Vertue.*

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L O N D O N:

Printed in the Year, MDCCIII.



British Museum

Printed in the Year, MDCCIII

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## THE INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE Defenders of Occasional Conformity are at last come to a Point. They have given up the Cause so far as ever the first Opposer pusht it at them. The Author of a Book, call'd, *Moderation a Virtue*, has very ingenuously Acknowledg'd all that was desir'd.

And, indeed, a Man of his Candor could do no less, since he is of too penetrating a Judgment not to know, and of too much Honesty of Principles, not to own that 'tis impossible to be Defended.

Wherefore I think it cannot give Offence either to him, or to any Body else, to Publish the Conclusion of the Argument in his own Words, and to let all Men know,

That 'tis Granted by the Dissenters,

That to Conform to the Church of *England*, and receive the Sacrament, meerly to Qualify for a Civil Employment, is a scandalous Practice, a Reproach to Religion, and Offensive to all good Christians.

If therefore, for the future, any Dissenter shall be Guilty of this scandalous, reproachful Practice, let no Man reflect upon the Body of the Dissenters for an Error of a single Member, he is to bear the Burthen himself, for his Mistake is his own, the Party disowns the Practice.

But the Defenders of this Occasional License are like a resolute Garrison, who being Beaten out of a Town retire to the Castle; the open and scandalous Conformity of such People who too notoriously used it as a Qualification for Ci-

## The Introduction.

*vil Employments, appearing too low a Step to bear a Defence, they have politickly drawn in a great many honest, well-meaning Gentlemen to side with the thing, on account of a General Charity, and its being Lawful in its own Nature.*

*The Meaning is, that having brought People to be Reconcil'd to the thing in it self, it may look the less odious in the other Circumstances of it.*

*But for what yet appears this Shift will fail too, and all that has been yet said, does not seem to me to clear it up.*

*God forbid that I should say Conforming to the Church of England, abstractedly and singly consider'd, is a Sin. But I cannot see the least Argument to prove what I alledge to be untrue, viz. That 'tis a Sin in a Dissenter to Conform to the Church of England, or else his Dissenting is a Sin, and he ought to Repent of one, or of the other.*

*This, I think, will appear, when all the Authorities for this Occasional Compliance are Examined, and, as I trust they shall be, fairly Confuted.*

*This is what none of our Opponents have yet replied to, but continue to fetch a compass round it, and Reply to Things which really are not of so much Consequence in the Case.*

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THE

# THE Sincerity of the Dissenters

## VINDICATED, &c.

**I**N the Argument against *Occasional Conformity*, 'tis not improper to observe, There are two Sorts of People blame the *Dissenters*.

1. Their Brethren Dissenters, who cannot Satisfy themselves in the same Latitude of Principles.
2. The Strict Conformist.

To me it seems as necessary to Examine the Different Reasons of these Opponents, as it is to Examine the Lawfulness of the Fact; and as it is a part of the Dispute which has not yet been brought upon the Stage, it may be very useful to bring Parties to a right Understanding.

'Tis most certain, That these two Parties do not Cavil at the *Occasional Conformity* of the Dissenters from the same Principle, nor with the same End and Design.

The Stricter *Dissenter* Argues against it from a Conscientious Dislike of the Practice; the *Militant Church-man*, from a Dislike of the Consequence; the *Dissenter* is against the Communicating, as a Religi-

ous Error; the *Church-man*, as a Politick One; the *Dissenter* Explodes it as a Sin against the Reputation and Interest of the *Dissenter*; the *Church-man*, as a Sin against the Interest of the *Church*; the *Dissenter*, as it weakens the *Dissenters*, and prepares their Members to fall off, and Posterity to Conform totally, to what their Fathers Conform'd to *Occasionally*; the *Church-man* dislikes it, as it lets the *Whigs* into Places, and State Employments, and weakens the Party that are to carry on other Designs.

As the difference of Design is manifest, so the Arguments on both sides exceedingly differ.

The *Dissenter* Charges the *Occasional-Man* with Breach of his relative Engagements to Church Societies, deserting his first Principles, Condemning his first Dissent, and the like: But the *Church-man*, with Hypocrisy, Tricking and Undermining the Government, Defeating the Laws, and the like.

As to the last I cannot but blame the Heat of these Men, who cry out upon the *Dissenters*, as Cheats and Hypocrites; tho', at the same time, I cannot approve the practice of *Occasional Conformity* as such.

As to the Trick put upon the State by the *Dissenters*, it is either an unjust Charge, or it is but a Return in kind, since 'tis plain that the Test was it self a Trick, being pretended to be not against them, but the *Papists*, and is by a strain of Words bent at the *Dissenters* to serve a Turn: And allow it had been the Sence of the Law, 'tis plain, by the Consequence, it was not made to bring the *Dissenters* to Church, but to keep them out of the Government, which since the *Dissenters* have prevented by complying, they are angry the Trick is discovered.

The Author of these Sheets freely owns himself an Opposer of *Occasional Conformity*, but 'tis because he would

would have the *Dissenters* preserve what he has often advanc'd in their Favour, viz. *That they are really Dissenters for Conscience Sake*, and this he conceives cannot be reconcil'd to an Occasional complying with that from which they had before Dissented, and on account whereof they could justify a Separation from the Establish'd Church.

This being premis'd, the Defenders of this Practice are manifestly in an Error in their manner of Justifying it, since they seem to bend the strength of their Replies against the Friendly Opposer, and not against the furious Assaults made upon their Integrity, tho' the last will appear the much easier Enemy to be overcome.

This seems to be observ'd in the late Author of a Book; Entituled, *Moderation a Virtue*, and I cannot but let that Gentleman know, that from his Title the World expected an Answer to those Hot Gentlemen who rally the *Dissenters* with Hypocrisy, and State Tricks, in this Case, while the principal Part of his Argument lies only against the stricter *Dissenter*, as such, tho' pointed at the *Church-man*, lessening the Difference between them and the Church, in order to make *Conformity* seem a thing of less Moment than it is, forgetting that the less the Difference is, the less the Reasons for a Schismatical Separation will appear, and the Grounds and Reasons by which their Dissenting is to be defended, appear the less justifiable.

Of seven Heads of his Arguments I am therefore ready to leave the last four for some body else to answer, and only observe a little on the first Three what the Arguments amount to, which Vindicate the *Occasional Communion of a Dissenter*, as in its self Lawful.

And

And first, as to his Precedents, he is pleas'd to prove that *this Occasional Conformity is no new thing, but has the Warrants of uncontestable Precedents.*

Nor indeed, is his Argument new, any more than the *Communion*, but what has been before started, and lately very happily answer'd: But as this Author is far from being unworthy an Answer so as he writes both strenuously, and yet modestly, he deserves an Answer of Respect.

I have already noted a very honest Concession granted by this Author, *that he does not justify such as Conform merely for a Place, but owns it as a scandalous Practice.*

This is granting all the real Ground of the Dispute. For, as strictly speaking, it may be possible that a Man may really Conform Occasionally to the Church, without offence to his Conscience, yet to run it up to the Extreamest Nicety, and avoid the real Offence taken at the Practice, is waving the Argument, and falling upon another never proposed.

Before therefore we come to the Argument, I must observe that a Man may do a thing without Offence to his Conscience, which may be really Sinful, and his Conscience not being duly inform'd, does not make the thing Lawful in Practice, what ever it may be to him.

But as the first Occasion of this Dispute was chiefly bent at such, who really Conform to qualify themselves for State Employments, it remains to Examine, whether these Gentlemen charg'd, have really done so, or no; and since naming of Names is very improper, and not absolutely necessary in this Case, I shall only lay down one Case in which, I think, without Breach of Charity, a Man may be allow'd to guess, that a Conforming is merely for the Qualification.

When

When a Man, who is a profest *Dissenter*, join'd in Communion with a separate Congregation, and either never, or not for a long time, did Communicate with the Church, but upon some prospect of Preferment, some Election, Place, Profit, or Perquisit, shall Conform to the Church of a sudden, and so very remarkably, as to time, *viz. the Eve of an Election, or the like*, that all Men must guess at the reason of doing it, and after this the Person never to Conform again, but upon like Occasion.

Shall any Man be judg'd for believing such a Man Conforms for the Place; shall this be call'd the *Moderate Conscientious Dissenter*, who this Character will distinguish from others, let them find out among his Neighbours who know him, I shall go no farther.

To justify this Conformity much time has been spent, and labour lost, for I must account it lost, and this Author has granted me the Clause, which is a Token of his Honesty, for really it is not to be defended. But here seems to lye an opportunity now to cover this scandalous Practice with the pretence of Conscience, and 'tis but being a little wary as to Circumstances, and we may all, for the future, be *Conscientious Occasional Conformists*, and *Conscientious Dissenters*, both together.

And to make way for this, Endeavours are us'd first to prove the general Practice Lawful; I confess the particular practice above nam'd was always the principal Design, but since it is come so far, as that one must be defended, or *at least conceal'd by the other*, I shall endeavour to show this covering will be too short for the Bed, and the Shame and Nakedness will appear; and as the particular Conformity we are upon is fairly suppress'd, I shall Enquire, if the General will hold water by it self. And first for Precedents, I cannot but wonder at

those which our Author present us with, *John the Baptist*, and our Saviour.

*John the Baptist*, says he, was an Occasional Conformist to the *Jewish Church*, he went to *Jerusalem* thrice a Year to Worship, but held seperate Assemblies in the Wilderness, and Taught and Baptiz'd.

'Tis plain *John the Baptist* was no Dissenter at all, he was a Preacher of Righteousness, and the Jews approv'd him, for all Men held him for a Prophet, but held all the Parts of the Establish'd Worship entire; he Preach'd, in the Wilderness, but what did he say, *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*: He neither Dissented from the *Jewish Worship*, nor taught others to do so, but as a Fore-runner, who went to prepare the way, told them the Gospel, the *Messiah*, and Saviour was at hand; the finishing of the old Worship was at the Door, and the Son of God coming to Erect his Kingdom in the World. What was all this to Dissenting? He preach'd neither against their Doctrine nor Ceremonies, he Conform'd to them all himself, only such as would receive his Baptism, which was only a Token of their Faith in the Blessed Tidings he brought them, receiv'd it; but they were not taught, in the least, to Dissent from the Establish'd Worship.

With what reason can it be concluded from hence, that Christianity had its Rise in Occasional Conformity, the Conclusion of this Argument favours of more Levity than this Author any where else discovers, and seems a little too much a Sophism, for a Man, of his Judgment, to offer, in reasoning upon a Subject so serious.

Our Lord *Jesus Christ*, says he, the Author of our Holy Religion, was also an Occasional Conformist, God forbid I should dare to write so. Our Lord was a strict compleat Conformist to the Ceremonial Institution, in every part of it that was Divine, but abhor'd the Innovati-

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ons of the Jews. And he continued Conforming even to the last Passover, which he Eat with his Disciples, and not only was so himself, but he instructed his Disciples in the like, *They sit in Moses Seat, whatsoever therefore they bid ye do, that do ye. Think not I am come to Destroy the Law, I am not come to Destroy the Law, but to fulfil.* 'Tis true, our blessed Lord did preach against the Innovations which the Traditions of the *Elders*, and the several divided Sects had brought into their Religion; he reproach'd them with making his holy House of Prayer a Den of Thieves; with teaching for Doctrine the Commandments of Men, and the like; but this was no more Dissenting from the Legal Institution, which was the Establish'd Worship, than the Prophet *Elijah's* over-turning the Altars of *Baal*, and slaying their Priests, was a Dissenting, for if purging the Church from Idols be Dissenting, such it was; our Saviour taught, but all his Teachings were full of Expositions of the Law, and Comments upon the Prophets, and quoting them where they led unto himself. Nor did he omit the Worship of their Temple and Synagogues, tho' he took all other Opportunities; indeed, to teach the People in all places, but he submitted to Circumcision, Eat the Passover at the Appointed time, and his Mother perform'd her proper Offerings of Purification.

At the Death of our Lord, he pronounc'd the great Work of Redemption finish'd; the Law was thence resolv'd into the Gospel; the Veil of the Temple rent in twain, and the *Levitical* Institution began to cease; I do not say entirely ceased.

Our blessed Lord having Offer'd up himself a Sacrifice Once for all, the Apostles never were found seeking to any Propitiation, but that of Faith in his Blood.

But in the Interval between the Establishing Christianity, and the entire Dissolution of the *Jewish* Rites, as a Religion the Apostles, as *Jews* born, are found in a promiscuous Occasional Exercise of both; but what is to be gather'd from it, only this, That it remains to Examine, whether the Law expir'd at once, or by Gradations: If it Expir'd at once, when that Time was; if Gradually, when it arriv'd to a total Demise.

If the *Levitical* Institution expir'd at once, and that point of Time was when our Lord said, *It is Finished*, then it is as Lawful to Conform to the *Jewish* Worship, on Occasion, now, as it was then.

If not at this Time, but Gradually, then the first Institution being all of Divine Original, and *One* only a shadow of the *Other*, the Gospel being the thing Typified, and the Law the Type; it was neither a Dissent, nor a Conforming, for the *Jews* to Exercise religious Worship in either, because the Religion was but the same thing, and the Ceremonies of the New were not yet Settled. But I do not say so of the Christians who were *Gentiles*.

But our Author, who has said all this, comes off again with this Caution, *I am not concern'd to prove the Case of our Dissenters to be Parallel with these; but it appears that Occasional Communion may, in some Cases, be Lawful.*

But, in my Opinion, if our Case is not Parallel, any one might be allow'd to Ask, What's this to us? If the Cases are not alike, the Arguments are not alike.

I cannot think 'tis just to infer, That because Occasional Conformity may, in some Cases, be Lawful, therefore 'tis Lawful in our Case, unless our Case, and those *some Cases*, agree: For, if so, then 'tis as Lawful for us Occasionally to Conform to the *Romish* Church, or to the

the Jewish Church. For, by our Author's Argument, a Christian has nothing to do but to Examine, whether he thinks it Lawful in his Case, or no.

But not one Man has yet attempted to Explain this Question, *How the Dissenting can be Justified, when we can so easily Conform*: The making a Breach in the Establish'd Church, a Schism in the General Union; The Breaking off from a General Communion; The Erecting private Churches, a sepearate Discipline; and all this for Things which Occasionally we can Comply with.

If any *Occasion* can justify a *Conformity*, no *Occasion* can be of greater moment than Peace, Union, Charity, Order, Obedience to Princes, Laws, and the like. If we have not thought these sufficient Occasions; Let us see which are Greater.

But after all, pray let us Examine this Great Article of Conformity in the Apostles, and I am of Opinion it shall come out fairly, that really the Apostles were not Occasional Conformists at all.

And first in General, I Affirm none of the Apostles are ever found Conforming to any thing which they had declar'd their dissent from before; but let us Examine, wherein they did actually Conform, and why.

If any Man will but give himself leave to Distinguish a little in the Case, he may arrive at the Truth of this Matter with a small difficulty: He need only distinguish between the Practice of the Apostles as Jews, born under the Obligation of the *Levitical Law*, and continuing still under more Obligations than Christian Profelytes, and observe, that as Jews they found themselves under some Legal Duties which the Gentile Christians were absolutely Free from: And therefore all that we call *Occasional Conformity*, was only doing what they were bound in Conscience to do, and had never Dissented from.

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The Circumcising of *Timothy*, and the several Parts of the Law *St. Paul* Conform'd to, were nothing but what, as *Jews*, they were obliged to, and their Faith in the Saviour did not at all take off the Obligation from those who were *Hebrews* born, and were then alive, they were still Zealous of the Law, *Acts* 21. 20. and the Obligation to be so continued to them. For this Reason the Circumcision of *Timothy* is justified, because his Mother and Grandmother were *Hebrews*, whereas it is expressly said *St. Paul* refus'd to Circumcise *Titus*, because his Father was a *Greek*.

By this it appears, that Circumcision was Administer'd in *Timothy*, not as an Occasional Conformity, but as a Duty, and a Thing which *Timothy*, as a Son of Jewish Parents, ought to do; and it rather seems strange it was not done before.

To Prove this, see what is, in the same Case, said to the Christians, who were *Gentiles* by Birth, even the same Apostle says, *If they were Circumcised, Christ should profit them nothing.*

The Matter therefore rested upon such a Conformity as was requir'd of them as *Jews*, and which the Death of Christ could not Dissolve the Obligation of, to them who were then alive, because the Force of them began in their being Born of the Stock of *Abraham*.

But if the Opponent, in this Matter, can show me one Instance in the whole Scripture, of any Christian, whether Apostle, or Elder, who being born a *Gentile*, did, by this Authority, Conform to the Jewish Ceremonies, even in the least Article, then I'll throw up this Point; and if not, then I should be glad to meet with the same Candor, either to have my Argument Answer'd or Granted.

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This Matter will further appear, if any Man will but take the pains to Examine the Scriptures in the Case: The History of the Apostles coming to Jerusalem, seems to me to make it plain, in the 21<sup>st</sup>. of the *Acts* v. 20. the Brethren come to St. Paul, and tell him, That the Multitude of Converted *Hebrews* had Entertain'd a Scandal at his Conversation, from Reports rais'd upon him, *That he taught the Jews to forsake Moses's Law.*

Now it appears, that this was really a false Report, by the care taken to Convince the *Jewish* Believers of it, Verse the 23. 24. *Do therefore this that we say unto thee. We have four Men which have a Vow on them, them take and Purify thy self with them, and be at charges with them that they may shave their Heads.*

It remains to Enquire what was all this for: It was not, as is pretended, a Conforming on Occasion to prevent giving Offence, but it was a Practising that which was still Lawful, that the scandalous Report might be Confuted, and the next Words make it out, *viz. That all may know that those Things whereof they are Informed concerning thee are nothing, that is, that 'tis all false and scandalous, and that those Jews, who Believed, were still to walk orderly, and to keep the Law.*

That therefore the Christians, who were Converted from the *Jews*, were thus obliged to keep the Law is plain, and 'tis clear the keeping the Law could be no Sin, because of its Divine Original.

But let us look to the *Gentiles*, and let them show me one Act of Occasional Conformity among them, Verse the 25<sup>th</sup>. *as concerning the Gentiles, who believe*

we have written, and concluded that they observe no such thing; and at the same time that the Apostle Circumcised *Timothy*, because his Mother was a *Hebrew*, as is Noted before, he refus'd to Circumcise *Titus* because his Parents were *Greeks*, having said of the *Gentiles*, *That if they are Circumcised, Christ shall be to them of no effect.*

Thus, I think, this mighty Difficulty is over, the Occasional Conformity of the Apostles at an end, and the Uniformity of the Christian Church in its first Institution, Vindicated.

Our Commentators, say, God indulg'd the *Jews* the liberty of Using, or not Using, the *Ceremoniale* of the Law, as a thing wholly Indifferent; and as what, upon the general Revolution which Religion came under at the Death of our Lord, was necessary to Reconcile the *Jews* to the Change.

Others are of Opinion, it was a Burthen on the *Jewish* Believers, which the *Gentiles* were freed from, but they oblig'd to.

And this seems plain from *Acts 15. 28.* *It seem'd good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater Burthen than this, that ye abstain from meats offer'd to Idols, and from Blood.* This was to the *Gentiles*, but the keeping of the Law was a Burthen yet left on the *Jews*, who were turn'd Christians, and then in being.

But be which of these Opinions we will in the Right, both allow that it only respected the *Jews*, and them no further than those then alive; and that the *Gentile* Converts were not allow'd the least Shaddow of a Compliance, or Occasional Conformity; No, not to the least, and most Indifferent Ceremony. And tho' the Connexion between *Circumcision* and *Baptism* was plain, and they were equally Seals of the Covenant, yet for a  
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*Gentile* Christian to have accepted Circumcision, had been to make the Death of Christ of no effect to him.

And, indeed, as the Death of Christ had a positive Effect upon the Law to Abrogate and Disannul it, the *Jews*, then in being, might be under Vows and Orders, which their Embracing the Faith of Christ did not Destroy ; but if after the Death of Christ any Christian, who was not a *Jew* born, might, on occasion, Conform to the old Law of *Moses*, it can never be Answer'd why it is less Lawful now.

The Inference therefore drawn by the Author p. 9. that by this it appears Occasional Communion, in some Case, may be Lawful, where Constant Communion would be a Sin, cannot be true ; that is, it cannot be true from those Premises, because the Fact of those Premises does not appear to be true, either that *John* the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ, or any of the Apostles, were Occasional Conformists.

As to the Sacrifices and Supplications offered up at the Temple for foreign Princes, or Heathen Emperors and Powers ; first, I am not Satisfied that it was not an Innovation, or Tradition, many of which crept into the *Jewish* Worship, till they became of equal Authority to the Law it self.

But if it were true, it seems no more an Instance of Occasional Conformity, than it would be in the Dissenters of *England* on a formal Request from the Emperor of *Germany*, or the Pope, to keep a solemn Fast to Pray for them, this might be Occasional Conformity in the Emperor to us, but not in us to him. It was a publick Acknowledgment in the *Romans*, and a Testimony to the Verity of the *Jews* Religion, but it was no Conforming to the *Romans*, in offering Sacrifices to

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God for the Welfare of their Emperors; and I cannot but admire for what use, in this Argument, this Case is brought, being, in my humble Opinion, nothing at all to the Matter.

From hence I must lay down, That Occasional Conformity is not sufficiently prov'd by Precedents and Authorities of Scripture.

Our Author's second Head is, to prove, *That the Principles of the conscientious Occasional Conformist are Christian and Catholick, and will Justify him before God and Man.*

This Argument, I think, lies a little unfair, for the Man is not rightly describ'd, who is this conscientious Occasional Conformist.

The Question before me seems to lye thus, Whether a Thing that would otherwise be Unlawful, is Justifiable because the Person acting it is not Reprov'd in it by his Conscience.

The Man is brought in with Extraordinary Qualifications, "Not of a Mercenary Spirit, or Sinister Intention to the Establish'd Church: He believes it a True Church, Owns her Ministry, Acknowledges her Liturgy to be sound for Substance.

"But because he conceives the Dissenting Churches to be True Churches, and their Ministers generally Men of real Piety, he thinks himself oblig'd to hold Communion with them. Now, where shall we find this Man? This is not the Dissenter we are upon.

With Submission, this Man never was a Dissenter, he who, in his Conscience, believes all the abovesaid of the Church of *England*, and has no more to say why he Dissents, may very well justify Conforming to the Church, but I am sure he can never

never justify Dissenting from them. Shall we make a Schism in the Establish'd Church, only because we believe the Dissenting Churches to be True Churches, and their Ministers good Men? This will never Justify us.

But our Author goes on, *p. 11.* to Enumerate the Things for which the Dissenter quits the Church Communion, as

1. A Defective Discipline.
2. A Promiscuous Communion, contrary to the Rules of the Gospel, and the Primitive Practice of the Church.
3. An Impos'd Liturgy, to an entire Loss of the Gift of Prayer.
4. Human Mixtures in the Ministration, as the Cross, Surplice, &c.
5. The Obligation on a Christian, to seek the best Guides for his Soul.

This is a Satyr upon the Church of *England*, and the True and Real Grounds of a Dissenter's Separation; and he that Dissents on these Grounds, can never Conform upon Occasion; if he does, how he can, at the same time, Justify his Dissenting, remains with me a Question yet unanswer'd.

All the Instances brought from *Dr. Bates*, *Mr. Baxter*, *Mr. Corbett*, *Mr. Tallents*, have some particular Exceptions, at first the great Dispute in their Cases is between Lay Conformity, and Conformity as Clergy-Men; as Lay-men they could Conform, as Clergy-men they could not, and preach'd in seperate Churches, on-

ly because the Church having shut the Door against them, they thought themselves oblig'd, as they were Lawful ordain'd Ministers, not to desist from the Work of their Office, though Man had impos'd some Things on them which they could not comply with, but that they were under an indispensable Necessity to preach the Gospel, and to Exercise their Duty, tho' they were silenc'd by the Law.

I think the third Head is something of Kin to the second ; for this is to show that *the Difference between the Church of England, and the Dissenter, is but little.*

I solemnly Appeal to the Searcher of all Hearts, that I am none of those who are for making the Difference greater than it really is.

And with the same Sincerity, I protest I wish it was not so great as it is, and heartily wish I could Conform wholly to the Church.

And I wish the Church, to try the Sincerity of the *Dissenters*, would come to a Temper ; abate us what, without Prejudice to Doctrine, or Discipline, might be abated, and condescend so far to the Tender Consciences of us their weaker Brethren, that all the *Dissenters* of a Catholick Spirit might come in, and join with them.

But as I would not make the Difference wider, so I cannot make it less ; I cannot bring my Dissenting Reasons to such Punctilio's, and reduce them all to Trifles, without reproaching my self with a needless and unchristian Separation : For I cannot but say, God forbid I should be found making, or keeping up a Breach in the Christian Union and Charity of the Church for little Matters, and divide in Communion for Trifles.

Our

Our Author says, we Agree in all the Essentials of Christianity, and differ only in Accidentals; and the great things, in which we agree, should be more powerful to unite us, than the lesser, in which we differ, should be to divide.

I cannot think I do the Author Injustice if I say, if this be true, no Man can justify Dissenting from the Church; and if it be any thing but a strong Argument for a constant Conformity, then I am at a loss to understand plain *English*.

We agree in all the great Things, and differ only in Small; the great Things, in which we agree, ought to be more powerful to make us Conform, than the small Things should be to make us Dissent, that is, we ought to Conform.

If this be true, why do we not Conform? How can we justify our Dissenting.

*They agree, and none of them scruple a Moderate Episcopacy, says our Author.*

This I refer to the whole Church of Scotland, who are all *Presbyterians*, and have suffer'd as much for a Dissenting from Prelacy, as ever the Church of England did for Dissenting from Popery. If the *English Dissenters* do not scruple Episcopacy, then I confess I am at a Loss to know why we dissent.

But then we are led to this Argument by the word *Moderate Dissenter*, and *Moderate Episcopacy*, either this *Moderate Dissenter* is no Dissenter, or this *Moderate Episcopacy* is no Episcopacy. Indeed the Church-men do look on Arch-bishop *Usher's* Model to be no Episcopacy at all.

*They agree in their Publick Worship; their Prayers and Praises are, for Substance, the same, says this Author.*

to Witness, say I, their Cathedral Worship; their Choristers, Musick, Singing their Prayers; their Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions, Chapters, Dignities, Vestments, Bowings to the Altar, and at the Name of Jesus, their Responses, Anthems, Exorcisms, and a numberless variety of things the *Dissenter* has no concern about in his Worship.

I wonder any Gentleman of so much Learning and Candor, can say our Praises and Prayers are the same for Substance.

Nay even this very Author employs very good Reasons for our not complying with the Liturgy; nor thinking it Lawful to impose Forms upon the Ministry, and tye them up to them.

The Difference about Ordination of Ministers which this Author is pleas'd to say is inconsiderable, is the next; and I cannot agree that this is a small Difference, and all he says on this Head, seems to me to be a good Reason, why the Church should agree to allow an Ordination by *Presbyters*, but no reason to satisfy the *Dissenter* with Episcopal Ordination.

I believe there are five Reasons to be given why the Church of *England* should allow, and accept of an Ordination by *Presbyters*, to one, why the *Dissenter* should submit to Episcopal Ordination.

And if it be only this One, 'tis a great One, which even our Author has Quoted, viz. that Ordination by *Presbyters*, without the *Diocesan*, is own'd by the Church of *England*, to be *Orthodox* in that great Act of Parliament, by which the Reformation was Establish'd in *England* in Queen *Elizabeth's* time 13. *Eliz.* Cap. 12.

What

What has been since, has been impos'd by the Craft, and for the private designs of *States Men* in the Church, whose designs have been not to have the *Dissenters* conform, but to keep them rather the farther from Conforming.

As to the rest of this Book, I leave the *Church-Men* to Answer it if they can.

As about the multitude of Broils, Parties and Contentions, the Church has within her self, how Inconsistent with her own Canon and prescrib'd Rules many of her Members act, these are most True, and all the rest of his Heads I readily Grant as his fourth Head, *That employing Dissenters is so far from weakening, that it strengthens the Church.*

This he may more easily persuade me to believe, than he will the Church-men of the high Party, who rail at it.

Fifth, *That Occasional Conformity is an Advantage to the Church, and weakens the Dissenters:* The latter I believe, and therefore would not have the Dissenter be concern'd in it, and wonder if the Author believes so, how he that is a Dissenter can argue for the Practice, the Dissenters ought to thank him for it.

I doubt not but this Occasional Conforming of the Dissenters in this Age, is a Prologue to a total Conformity in the next, and leads our Posterity to quit that Dissenting wholly, which they saw their Fathers could quit as they found Occasion; and I desire him, in his next, to tell us what Advantage it is any way to the Dissenters.

Sixth, *That the late Bill against Occasional Conformity would have been highly Prejudicial to the Church.*

I be-

I believe so, and to the *Dissenters* too; and therefore the Lords dismiss it, as not proper by any means to pass into a Law.

His last Argument, that *Dissenters*, from National Establish'd Churches, have always been Employ'd by most Nations and Governments, I grant, and he has effectually made it appear.

But all this leaves the matter where we found it.

That Conforming to the Church of *England*, as it has been lately Practis'd by the *Dissenters*, for the qualifying themselves for Places and Employments in the Government, is a Practice unwarrantable from the Scripture, Pernicious to the *Dissenters* themselves, and will be fatal both to their Reputation and Interest.

And tho' really *Occasional Communion* does not seem Clear to me on any score whatever,

Yet, this is out of doubt, and the Author I have been naming, readily grants it me. That tho' *Occasional Conformity* Abstracted might be justify'd, yet, this is no justifiable Occasion.

Since then, the Dispute will end as to this Occasion, those who are willing to be concern'd in any further Debate of it, would do well to lay down what Occasions are sufficient to justify Conforming to the Church, and what Circumstances are required to such an Occasion; that the honest Conscientious *Occasional Conformist*, if such a Man can be, may be distinguish'd from the *Hypocrite*, and the whole Party may not bear the Reproach.

And, because this Point has never been yielded before, I cannot dismiss it without some Remarks,  
which

which I judge Natural from the Premises, and Necessary to the Circumstance.

As first, 'tis apparent many of the Dissenters who have thus Conform'd, have never in the whole Course of their Lives Conform'd before; no, not when Persecuted by the Church of *England*, have suffer'd Imprisonment, Confiscation of Goods, and several other publick Oppressions, and never would Conform: But when Invited to Places of Honour or Profit, have Complied, thinking the Obtaining a good Place, a sufficient Occasion to Invite them; when neither the Laws, nor the Persecution it self could be thought an Occasion to Compel.

Now, if as is own'd, *Moderation a Vertue*, p. 7. *This be a Reproach to Religion, and Offensive to all good Christians*, then they ought to avoid the Practice, or to Regulate it, so as that it may not appear to be done merely as a Qualification.

Another Remark I cannot but make, That if Occasional Conformity be Lawful, then it cannot be True, as too many have said, That this Dispute will bring Persecution upon the Dissenters.

For 'tis no Breach of Charity, to say none of those Gentlemen who can Voluntarily Conform, will ever suffer Persecution for not Conforming; and this Confirms the ill Actings of those who did suffer before, and Conform'd afterwards: For 'tis plain, by their Suffering, their Consciences were against it before; and 'tis as plain, by their Complying, that the Advantage smother'd the Scruple.

A Man

A Man can by no possible Arguing justify suffering persecution, for that which he can, with a satisfied Conscience, comply with. If therefore a hot Persecution should come on the *Dissenters*, which God forbid, *Occasional Communion* secures all those who can comply. For if to avoid Persecution be not a justifiable occasion, I know very few occasions which can be justified.

And 'tis for this Reason I would entreat those Gentlemen to let us know what are justifiable Occasions, and what are not.

Now as our Author has furnish'd us out of History with a great many excellent Precedents for the employing *Dissenters* both in the Governments and Armies of those Nations where they dwell.

I wish with all my Heart he had pleas'd to Examine History for all those glorious Instances of the Confessors and Martyrs of all Ages, who have sacrificed their Lives even for the rejecting the most Minute Articles of Conformity upon the most pressing and extraordinary Occasions.

I shall rather recommend my Reader to the Histories where such Instances are to be found, than trouble him with a long Transcription of the Particulars.

Let them who are curious in this Search, Examine the Martyrologies of the Church from its first Institution; and first let him but view the young *Maccabees*, and their wonderful Mother, and when the Torments they endur'd are consider'd; let them also consider what was the Occasion, only refusing to eat a Bit of Swines Flesh; nay, they would have excus'd them, if they would but have suffer'd them to put it into their Mouths by force

force, which they would not endure, but as soon as it was attempted, spit it out in the very Faces of their Tormentors; and died, rather than be guilty of *Occasional Conformity*.

Let such Men remember *Origen*, who having been guilty of *Occasional Conformity* only in the most passive manner he possibly could, as but suffering the Heathen Priest to put a little Frankincense into his Hand, and dropping it into the Fire, not so much as owning it to be a Sacrifice, much less owning the Idol to be a God; and see his Repentance, how many Years was he left in the Agonies of Despair, and how does he bemoan himself on that account, calling himself Apostate from Christ, and unworthy of Martyrdom.

The Primitive History of the Church gives us innumerable Instances of the Constancy and Exactness of the Christians in this Point.

And I only forbear to enumerate them, because they are to be found in the first Vol. of *Fox's Acts and Monuments* of the Church, in *Eusebius*, and in all the Historians of those Times.

But it may be answer'd, That this was a Conformity to what was absolutely unlawful, Idolatrous, and abominable, which is not to be alledged here.

To this I rejoin, he that Dissents from the Church of *England* does it, because he cannot in Conscience Comply, or else he can have no justifiable Reason for Dissenting. Now all things are unlawful to him, which his Conscience is not satisfied about, and tho' not equally abominable, are so much so, as that no Man can comply with them safely. But to obviate the Ob-

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jection

jection wholly, we will come nearer to the present Case.

The Church of *England* to her Glory be it spoken, is founded in the numerous throng of blessed Martyrs and Confessors, who have left their Memory and Example as a lasting Testimony against *Occasional Conformity*, even in the small, and some of them indifferent things.

Blessed Bishop *Hooper* when he came to the Stake to seal with his Blood, the Testimony of his Faith, and when in the last Agonies of his Life, the Queens Pardon was offer'd upon Terms, very much short of a total Conformity, only to set his Hand to an acknowledgement; cried out before it was read; *If you Love my Soul away with it.*

Let us now look abroad in Times more Modern, and within our Memory, and what are all the new Converts as they are call'd in *France*, but *Occasional Conformists*.

The Fire of Persecution having burnt up the Protestant Church, all those who could not stand the brunt, nor make their escape, or such whose Religion had not force enough with them, to make them suffer the loss of all, what did they do, they fly to this very refuge *Occasional Conformity*, and if the Arguments are Examin'd, they are much the same with Ours.

The Protestants do not deny but 'tis possible to be sav'd in the *Roman Church*, and they may, upon occasion therefore Conform in some things, while, at the same time, they reserve their Minds and Hearts entirely to the true Worship; and *Naaman*, the Syrian, say they, was such an *Occasional Conformist*, to whom the Prophet gave a tacit Licence, when, upon the proposal, he reply'd, *Go in Peace.*

Here

Here is the only Instance of *Occasional Conformity*, which exactly reaches our Case that I remember; and I see nothing can be said to justify Ours, which may not justify Theirs, only, that indeed the difference is not so great between *Protestant* and *Protestant*, as between *Protestant* and *Roman Catholic*.

But if the difference here be great enough to justify a Dissenting for Conscience sake, the Argument is the same.

The Case of kneeling in the Street when the *Roman* Processions come by, is as parallel to our Impos'd Ceremonies, as any thing in two different Religions can be, and yet, thus they *Occasionally Conform*, and please themselves with fancying that they do not do it as an Act of Worship. But our *Martyrs* in *Queen Mary's* time, frequently Sacrific'd their Blood on more minute Circumstances than that, as not suffering a Child to be Baptiz'd, tho' by Force, in the Case of *Mr. Glover*, *Mrs. Lane*, *John Field*, throwing down the Rood of *Dover Court*, and the like.

Now let any Man Examine the *Occasional Conformity* of the *Hugonots* in *France*, and tell me, if the Consequence is not very probable to be this, that one Age may make all their posterity *Roman Catholics*, *Vicé Versa*.

And what is the Opinion their Brethren, who are in Banishment, have of them. Come *les Person*s, *qu'on Avez Vendue leur Religion*, as Persons that have sold their Religion, People who have Tainted their Principles and testify'd that they cannot part with their Estates to preserve their Consciences.

They are still Protestants in their Inclination, and they please themselves, that this Conformity is justify'd by the occasion of it, and let them that like it follow their Example.

I am not concern'd here to prove that the Church of *Rome* is no true Church, that *Popery* is *Idolatry*, and that the Cases therefore do not agree. The Dissenting in both Cases is for Conscience sake, and therein the Cases are Parallel: We were once all of the *Roman* Church, and had never remov'd from thence, but from Scruples of Conscience, and we are now Dissenters from the Church of *England* from scruple of Conscience: We own the Church of *England* to be a true Church, and we do not deny Salvation to the Members of the *Roman*; there are things in the Church of *England* we cannot comply with, and there are some things in the Church of *Rome* which we could comply with, but there are things in both we Dissent from, and *Occasional Conformity* to those very things, can be justified from very few reasons on one side, which will not hold good on the other.

This in short then is the plain Conclusion of this Matter. *Occasional Conformity* to a Church from which we have separated, and in those things for which we separated, viz. Communion does not appear to be lawful or justifiable in a Dissenter, nor are there any Precedents for it in the Scripture.

But *Occasional Conformity* being practis'd as a Qualification for Civil Employments, is a Reproach to Religion, and scandalous to the Dissenters.

The last is fairly acknowledg'd by the Author of *Moderation a Vertue*, and I think the first is made plain in these Sheets.

Of the whole Argument then this is the sum:

1. Those *Dissenters* who are yet of the Opinion, it is not unlawful in it self, should take care to practise it so, as that those Circumstances of Qualification may not be suspected.

2. They should state what are sufficient Occasions to justifie our Conforming, to what at other times we have Dissented from, and give us Scripture Authorities to prove them.

3. They ought to let us see how they can justifie Dissenting at all, if they can defend Conforming again.

4. They ought to prove that the Conformity, or *Occasional Conformity* ( as they call it ) of Christ, and the Apostles, was to such things as were meerly of Mans' Appointment, or purely to such as were Divine ; or whether they Conform'd to any thing they Dissented from before.

But till some of these Points are settled, I cannot but think the whole practice of it a Scandal to the *Dissenters*, ruinous to their Interest ; and tends to the reducing them all or their Posterity at least to an absolute total Conformity, or at best a general Indifferency in Matters of Religion.

*FINIS.*

Of the whole Argument then this is the sum.

1. Those Dissenters who are yet of the Opinion, it is not unlawful in itself, should take care to practice it so, as that those Circumstances of Qualification may not be suspected.

2. They should state what are fallacious Objections to justify our Conforming to what at other times we have Dissented from, and give us Scripture Authorities to prove them.

3. They ought to let us see how they can justify Dissenting at all, if they can defend Conforming again.

4. They ought to prove that the Conformity, or Occasional Conformity (as they call it) of Christ, and the Apostles, was to such things as were merely of Man's Appointment, or purely to such as were Divine; or whether they Conformed to any thing they Dissented from before.

But till some of these Points are settled, I cannot but think the whole practice of it a Scandal to the Dissenters, ruinous to their Interest; and tends to the reducing them all or their Possessors at least to an absolute total Conformity, or at best a general Indifference in Matters of Religion.

FINIS.

